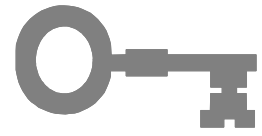


DAN



Disability Awareness Newsletter

Knowledge, the Key to Understanding

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Research, Education & Economics,

Spring 2000

DAN encourages REE employees who have or are familiar with a disabling condition to share in future issues. Comments on content or suggestions for future issues may be forwarded to Sue Dixon, ARS, Civil Rights Staff, Rm. 3554-S, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, Washington, DC 20250. Phone: 202-690-0372; FAX: 202-690-0109; E-Mail: sdixon@ars.usda.gov

MIGRAINE HEADACHES

The most common type of vascular headache is migraine. This type of headache is usually characterized by severe pain on one or both sides of head, an upset stomach, and at times disturbed vision.

Migraines have been part of civilization for a very long time – they are mentioned in historical writings made on papyrus by the ancient Egyptians! But a great deal more is known about them now and better relief can be offered.

Certain people are prone to a particular group of symptoms we call *migraines*. This is believed to be due to a biochemical problem in the central nervous system. The degree of the problem varies from one individual to another, which is why some people have migraines more often – or have them more severely – than others.

The attacks are believed to be caused by a problem in the central nervous system and can be triggered or worsened by such factors as stress or emotional changes. Researchers know for a fact that migraines have a medical basis – they are absolutely not *your imagination*. What's more, they can be brought on by changes that seem harmless, because your system is more sensitive to change. Changes like: travel, especially across time zones; getting much less – or much more – sleep than usual; skipping meals or a change in diet; hormonal changes; shifts in weather and barometric pressure; going from darkness to very bright light. Keeping to regular eating, exercise, and sleeping schedules while minimizing caffeine, smoking, and artificial sweeteners can help you manage better every day.

So far, the medical community has not found a *cure* for migraines. If you've been

diagnosed with migraines, the next step is up to you, because only you know exactly what your migraines are like – the severity, the frequency, and perhaps the cause of each one.

There are two types of migraines that are most prevalent: *Classic* and *Common*. The major difference is the appearance of neurological symptoms 10 to 30 minutes before a classic attack. These symptoms are called an aura. You may see flashing lights or zigzag lines, or may temporarily lose vision. The pain is intense, throbbing, or pounding and is felt in the forehead, temple, ear, jaw or around the eye. An attack lasts 1 to 2 days. The common migraine – a term that reflects the disorder's greater occurrence in the general population – is not preceded by aura. But some people experience a variety of vague symptoms beforehand, including mental fuzziness, mood changes, fatigue, and unusual retention of fluids. During the headache phase, a person may have diarrhea and increased urination, as well as nausea and vomiting. Common migraine pain can last 3 or 4 days.

Both types of migraine headaches can strike as often as several times a week, or as rarely as once every few years. They can occur at any time. Some people, however, experience migraines at predictable times – near the days of menstruation or every Saturday morning after a stressful week of work.

A key element in the cause of a migraine is blood flow changes in the brain. People who get migraine headaches appear to have blood vessels that overreact to various triggers. The nervous system responds to a trigger creating a spasm in the nerve-rich arteries at the base of the brain closing down or constricting several arteries supplying blood to the brain. Reduced

blood flow decreases the brain's supply of oxygen, this triggers certain arteries to open wider to meet the brain's energy needs. Symptoms signaling a headache, such as distorted vision or speech, may then result, similar to symptoms of stroke. The result: a throbbing pain in the head.

*** *Triggers of Migraine Headache * ***

Foods:

- aged cheese
- alcohol
- nuts
- chocolate
- yogurt
- onions
- caffeinated foods and beverages
- monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- artificial sweeteners

Medications:

- antibiotics
- hormones (oral contraceptives, estrogens)
- histamine-2 blockers
- nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

Sensory Stimuli:

- flickering/bright lights
- sunlight
- odors

Lifestyle changes:

- time zones
- sleep patterns
- eating habits
- caffeine withdrawal
- stress

Other:

- high altitude
- menstrual cycle

*** * * Other Forms of Migraine * * ***

In addition to the classic and common types, a migraine headache can take several other forms:

Hemiplegic: Temporary paralysis on one side of the body, may experience vision problems and vertigo.

Ophthalmoplegic: Pain around the eye and is

associated with a droopy eyelid, and double vision.

Basilar Artery: Disturbance of a major brain artery. Occurs primarily in adolescent and young adult women and often associated with the menstrual cycle.

Benign exertional: Brought on by running, lifting, coughing, sneezing or bending.

*** * * Treatments * * ***

Drug therapy, biofeedback training, stress reduction, and elimination of certain foods from the diet are the most common methods of preventing and controlling migraine and other vascular headaches.

Regular exercise, such as swimming or vigorous walking, can also reduce the frequency and severity. Temporary relief can sometimes be obtained by using cold packs or by pressing on the bulging artery found in the front of the ear on the painful side of the head.

*** * * Where to Find Help * * ***

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke of The National Institutes of Health.

NIH Publication No. 96-158: "Headache: Hope Through Research" Internet:
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/patients/disorder/headache/head1.htm>

The American Council for Headache Education

19 Mantua Rd.
Mt. Royal, NJ 08061
609-423-0258
Internet: www.achenet.org

National Headache Foundation (NHF)
428 West St. James Place, 2nd Floor
Chicago, IL 60614-2750
800-843-2256
Internet: www.headaches.org

THE NEXT ISSUE OF 'DAN' WILL
FOCUS ON *Osteoporosis*.

*The DAN will also appear on the
ARS Civil Rights Staff Homepage.*